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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000162

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FOR AF/W, AF/EX, DS/IP/AF, CA/OCS
PLEASE PASS ALSO TO PEACE CORPS, ALSO FOR AID/AFR
TREASURY FOR OFFICE OF AFRICAN NATIONS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2017
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SUBJECT: SITREP NO. 29: GUINEA GENERAL STRIKE, FEB. 10,
1130 GMT

REF: CONAKRY 160 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Julie Winn. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This marks a resumption of Guinea sitreps suspended on
January 29.

SITUATION ON THE GROUND

¶1. (C) The security climate in Guinea is highly volatile and unpredictable following the appointment late February 9 of Eugene Camara as Prime Minister. After a night marked by sporadic rock-throwing and a brief early morning lull, the city has been hit with widespread protests and disturbances. These have taken place in the usual hotspots of Bambeto, Hamdallaye, Taouyah, and Donka, as well as in the Conakry suburbs. For the first time, the Autoroute, a primary artery, has been blocked as well. In many cases, students arriving at school for the usual Saturday classes were turned away by their teachers, told that the schools were closed. These young people, joined by non-students, are participating in various activities, from peaceful marching to more violent blockades, rock-throwing and tire-burning. The common chant and demand is "Change." We have unconfirmed reports that Lansana Conte's convoy was stoned as it passed through the outer suburbs, and he was forced to return to town this morning.

¶2. (C) The troubles, despite their severity, appear as pockets surrounded by calmer areas, and they do not appear to be centrally organized in any way. After a morning in which security forces were slow to respond, we understand that they are now beginning to engage and clear roads. Notably, there is no reinforced security presence at the Castro Bridge, which marks the beginning of the downtown area, and there are no reports of any significant trouble in that area. There is almost no vehicular traffic, and most stores are closed.

¶3. (C) There are also protests and, in some cases, violence, in some interior towns, including Kankan, Siguiiri, Kouroussa, and Faranah. An LES employee has contacted mayors in those town who say that the prefets (appointed representatives of the central government) have left town. The mayors, who feel relatively safe because they are locally elected, say that protesters have sacked and/or burned the prefets' offices and some gendarmeries. The security authorities in these town are not intervening. A Siguiiri contact told our FSN that some soldiers were dropping their arms and marching with the people. In the meantime, Labe, Mamou and N'Zerekore have

seen peaceful demonstrations this morning. These developments follow significant disturbances Feb. 8-9 in the interior town of Dingueraye, where a crowd of 3-4000 burned local offices, and in Coyah, near Conakry, where students angry over transport costs flashed over to violence when a local official trying to calm them mentioned President Conte.

¶4. (C) The U.S. Mission has returned to full standfast, with most personnel instructed to remain at their residences until further notice. We have cleared a similar warden message with the Department and have disseminating it.

POLITICAL UPDATE

¶5. (C) The political temperature has been rising over the last ten days as the population anxiously awaited the appointment of a new prime minister "of consensus." After days of speculation over whether and when Conte would make the appointment, the suspense ended evening of February 9 with a decree naming Eugene Camara. Camara an ethnic Guerze from the Forest Region, has most recently (over the last three weeks) been Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, replacing former Conte confidant Fode Bangoura. Prior to that, he was Minister of Plan for several years. He has also served as Minister of Higher Education and as Governor of the Forest Region. We have no information to suggest he is corrupt. He is a low profile figure, whose primary weakness appears to be his identification with the Conte regime, with which he has been associated for more than ten years -- anathema to the unions and the general public at this point.

¶6. (C) While the unions have not yet formally rejected

CONAKRY 00000162 002 OF 002

Camara, early interviews suggest that they may, and his appointment was met with an immediate declaration of outrage on the part of the major civil society confederation here, CNOSCG. Most importantly, the buzz on the "street" was immediately negative. One union official told poloff this morning that the union leadership would meet at noon local time to review Camara's dossier, to see whether there was any chance he could be acceptable. Head of the teachers union M'Bembah Soumah, however, was categoric with us that his organization had already decided against. (Note: M'Bembah also said that he had not told teachers to shut down the school; that was spontaneous on their part and something he deplored since it made a bad situation worse.) What is clear is that the unions' decision pro or con has, at this point, little to do with what the street believes -- or does.

DIPLOMATIC UPDATE

¶7. (C) By coincidence, Ambassador McDonald and other Western Ambassadors, including those of Germany, France, the UK and the EU, had already set an appointment for morning of February 10 with Eugene Camara in his capacity as Minister of State for Presidential Affairs. The purpose of this rare joint demarche was to deliver a strong message against the use of lethal force by the security forces against civilians; any such use of lethal force would call down international opprobrium. Prime Minister Camara responded that he had a track records as a man of dialogue and would do all within his power to prevent further killing. Further details of this meeting will be provided septel.

¶8. (C) Following his meeting with the Prime Minister, the Ambassador returned to his resident because road conditions between there and the Embassy do not permit safe passage. He is in continuous phone contact with DCM, who is at the Embassy.

SECURITY POSTURE

¶9. (C) Post remains on Authorized Departure status for eligible family members. The six dependents (two spouses and four children) who left the weekend of January 27 remain the only dependents to have taken the opportunity to leave. We anticipate that should the security situation remain this volatile, requiring the closure again of the International School, at least one additional family (one spouse and two children) will request departure. We have no reports of American citizens injured or in trouble at this time.

¶10. (C) The Mission has its fuel reserves topped off, and our wells provide sufficient water. The airport was open this morning for a flight. Our A/PAO returned early in the morning from a TDY to Ouagadougou, and two USAID employees departed. However, since the early morning, the streets leading to the airport have been consistently blocked. We are seeking to determine whether Air France will meet its regularly scheduled Saturday evening flight today.

¶11. (C) We will continue to monitor the situation closely.
MCDONALD